



Council of Georgist Organizations

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Annual Report from Dan Sullivan, CGO President

December 15, 2019

Dear friends and colleagues;

There is much to cover, including this year's conference in Pittsburgh and related outreach events, Common Ground's growing support, our outreach at the Labor Day Parade, the upcoming conference in Scranton, the Labor Day Parade after the conference, a proposal to hold conferences every two years with a possible bylaws conflict in with that proposal, a proposal to have a board of directors, some thoughts on advocacy, thoughts on the conference's importance, and, of course, an appeal for dues and donations.

The 2019 Pittsburgh Conference

Our conference this year was well attended, mostly because it included a tribute to Lindy Davies, the crusading and very well liked director of the Henry George Institute, who had recently succumbed to cancer. People who had not attended recent conferences made a point to attend this one. I was particularly happy to see George Collins, a former director of the Henry George School, come back from a long hiatus to honor Lindy. I wish I had more time to talk to him, as he had organized and spoken at the first conference I ever attended, and I have long considered him inspirational.

It was the first time we got to hear from Lindy's wife, Lisa Cooley, who had been working behind the scenes to support both Lindy and the Georgist cause. Lisa, George Collins, Mike Curtis and Mark Sullivan led the tribute.



I usually call attention to the outstanding sessions, but all of the sessions got very high reviews. I don't know if they were actually exceptional or whether people were just in generous spirits and inclined to give higher marks. Those of you who did not attend the conference can see them on video and judge for themselves. Paul Justus, who has also been battling cancer, is once again putting his and Scott Walton's videos online. Links are at <http://cgocouncil.org/videos/>. You can also see them all as he uploads them by searching YouTube for Council of Georgist Organizations and clicking "videos." Please hit the "like" button for those you think were worthwhile. Also, if you think any of these videos would be of interest to others, by all means share them.

People liked the balance of historical, theoretical and pragmatic events, with some blending into others. Our most purely theoretical talk was from professor Nicolaus Tideman of Virginia Tech, on how we might be able to assess and tax other kinds of monopolies. Joshua Vincent and Wyn Achenbaum spoke well of Georgist history in Pennsylvania, and Ed Dodson, who could not attend, presented a slide show that I used to introduce relationships between Terence Powderly, leader of the Knights of Labor, Samuel Gompers, founder and long-time head of the American Federation of Labor, and Henry George. This introduced later sessions on how Georgist labor history ties into current labor issues, and what we need to do to win labor's support today.

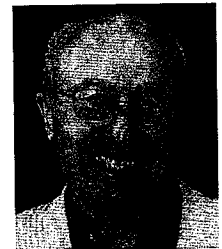
We had sessions on the progress we are making toward land value tax (LVT), with Rich Nymoen talking about promoting land trusts and LVT districts in Minnesota, Tom Gihring on advances toward land value tax in Oregon, Victor Ramirez on LVT in Puerto Rico, and Joshua Vincent adding to Victor's work and giving us news about other LVT efforts.

We also had sessions with non-Georgist participants. Steven Sharafman had written a book on the Basic Income (per-capita dividends), showing that such dividends are best funded from taxes on land value and resource extractions. The book he finished after the conference laid even more stress on land value tax. Rick Rybeck's talk on collecting land rent to fund public transit had respondents from the Amalgamated Transit Workers' Union and Pittsburghers for Public Transit, both of whom were very positive about using LVT to fund transit. Finally, Ray Roberts, the local leader of Citizens Climate Lobby made an excellent presentation on how to build relationships with elected officials.



Our banquet presentation was an excellent tribute to Congressman Bill Coyne, who had greatly increased LVT as president of Pittsburgh City Council. The tribute featured our own Walt Rybeck, who worked with Coyne in Washington, and he was joined by two non-Georgists who worked with Coyne, Augie Carlino and Patrick Michael Livingston. It was a particularly moving

tribute. The acoustics of the room made for low-quality audio, but it was too good a talk to let background noise destroy it. Paul Justus did a great job of filtering out most of the ambient noise, so there is a good version of it online.



People were very happy with the Pittsburgh Sheraton, located across the river from the Golden Triangle. It's a wedding hotel in the summer, so we got good rates by ending the conference on Saturday morning, just before the demand for wedding space peaked. As a result, it was significantly nicer and only slightly more expensive than our usual hotels.

Common Ground USA's New Sponsorship

We cut costs by cutting our number of unpaid volunteers, which meant everyone had to work harder, and also meant fewer young people got to go to the conference. However, Common Ground funded Rich Nymoen and Tom Gihring to help get them to the conference to speak about their advocacy in Minnesota and Oregon. This indirectly helps the conference by increasing attendance. Common Ground also made a generous donation to help fund the hospitality suite, which they are making again for the 2020 conference. The hospitality suite is the best part of the conference, as that's where people chat with each other informally and really make connections. We must also thank Osamu Uehara, who has made it his mission to give us a great hospitality experience.

Outreach at the Labor Day Parade



Harold Kyriazi, Kevin Daugherty and I handed out over 1800 booklets about Henry George's role in launching the labor movement (enclosed) at the Pittsburgh Labor Day Parade. At the end of the parade, Michael Lamb, our pro-LVT Pittsburgh City Controller (left), introduced me to Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf (right). Wolf surprised me with how much he knew about and liked LVT. Joshua Vincent and I had talked to people who were close to the governor, but had never talked to him directly. I will have more on additional outreach to labor and to elected officials later in this letter.

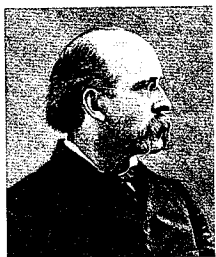


The 2020 Scranton Conference

We are holding our upcoming conference at the University of Scranton, July 9-13. It will be quite affordable, as their dorm space is less expensive than hotel space, especially for single individuals, their cafeteria food is inexpensive, and their caterers provide exceptional quality at modest prices. Their dormitories are very nice, and we have reduced rates at the nearby Radisson which used to be Scranton's main train station. (Lobby pictured at right.) The only issue is transportation, but flying to the Scranton Wilkes-Barre International Airport from the West is far better priced than it had been. There are also buses from New York and an Amtrak train from Philadelphia.



The program is not yet filled, but those who want to present something should contact us as soon as possible. Professor Nic Tideman of Virginia Tech will be speaking



on competitive assessing, where government awards prizes to outsiders for presenting the most accurate assessments, or for best improving on government assessments. Because Terence Powderly (at left) was a three-term mayor of Scranton as well as a great labor leader, we are hoping to involve the history department, the Lackawanna County Historical Society and the Pennsylvania Labor History Society for a session or two on Powderly. We also have people who want to do a Georgist critique of the Green New Deal.

The economics department of the University of Scranton is very friendly to Georgist ideas and is interested in participating, although it is not clear how many of their people will be away on vacation. Professor Ed Scahill is interested in a talk on Scranton's economic problems today.

More Labor Day Booklets Available

We had printed 5,000 booklets, because the main cost of printing is setup cost. Labor Day falls on Henry George's birthday again in 2024, so we can then hand out these booklets in another city that has a big Labor Day Parade and some Georgist volunteers. The booklets are also good to give to any union officials you might want to reach. We are working on similarly targeted literature on specific issues that union leaders care about, booklets for other interest groups, and a manual on how to reach out to public officials and civic leaders. (More copies are available, see registration form.)

Possible Biennial Conferences

At the last conference's business meeting, Mark Sullivan moved that we switch to holding conferences every two years instead of every year, so we would only hold conferences on even-numbered years. That motion passed, but Mark has since raised the concern that our bylaws call for an annual business meeting and conference, and that his motion was not for a bylaws change. We will therefore be sending members a ballot early next year for a bylaws change that would allow us to hold our annual meetings by video conferencing in years when we do not hold an on-site conference.

Should We Have a Board of Directors?

One of the reasons we considered biennial conferences is that institutional funding has fallen off over the years. We now have a planning committee that consists of the executive committee and a few volunteers. We will need to not only plan the conferences but raise money for them. That means we need more people than we have on the planning committee. I also think that personal donors have earned a right to influence policy by serving on the board of directors. Their perspectives are that of

those who have sacrificed for the good of the organization. Those perspectives are valuable and should be honored.

Advocacy: So Easy, and Yet So Hard

We have gradually been increasing the conference's focus on effective advocacy. As Citizens' Climate Lobby expert Ray Roberts pointed out in his workshop in Pittsburgh, advocacy done right is easier than many people make it out to be. It's mostly a matter of finding out what each elected official's concerns are and giving him information that shows how land value tax addresses those concerns. He will probably ask questions that express other concerns, so the next step is to get back to him with answers to those concerns. In doing this respectfully, the advocate builds friendly, supportive relationships with officials.

If our advocates come across as a nice, level-headed people who are more interested in helping than in demanding and pressuring, officials who likes our idea will introduce them to other officials, and momentum builds. Some officials will say "no," but the ones who matter are the ones who say "maybe." (They rarely say "yes" to anything without careful consideration.)

The difficulty of advocacy is not the work load, but the stress. The more one puts into tailoring one's pitch and presenting it, the more disappointing it is if nothing comes of it. If one does succeed in interesting an elected official, there is still nothing to show for it until a majority of officials actually pass tax rates or a majority of legislators actually pass enabling laws.

Tax rate changes only happen once a year, and new legislation usually takes several years. There is considerable stress in spending a whole year or several years advocating something and knowing that at the end of this time you will either come away with a tremendous victory or with nothing at all. That's a big part of why the advocate needs the support of his fellow Georgists. That means financial support, but it also means personal support in the form of encouragement, feedback, and help with tasks. When I was young and first involved in advocacy, I did not appreciate the importance of nurturing a community of dedicated Georgists.

My First Huge Mistake

Some people are task-oriented, and some are socially oriented. A healthy movement needs both. I am the former, so it is not part of my instinct to socialize. Back in 1978, when I first became dedicated to advocating for land value tax, there was a group of elderly Georgists who met for lunch in Pittsburgh once a month. They liked to talk about Georgist theory, history and other assorted subjects, but they were not doing anything about it. They wanted me to talk about what I was doing, but what I was doing involved a lot of tedious data analysis, and they weren't volunteering to help with it. They even turned convening the lunches over to me, and I eventually stopped doing that.

It was much later when I realized that some of them had been campaigning for land value tax all their lives, and were just too old and exhausted to keep going. One of them had even gotten Bill Coyne interested in land tax, which was what started the wave of

Pittsburgh victories. More than that, they knew the history of land tax efforts that were not important to me at the time, and are now lost. They knew some of the Georgist mayors and remembered some of our fine Georgist leaders. They weren't helping because I didn't know what help to ask for. I'm sure they would have funded the printing of literature, but I never asked them to. When we did win victories, I did not have them to celebrate with, and I now realize I had cheated them out of the chance to celebrate something they deeply cared about.

This is a big part of why I think the conference is important today. I came to realize that the conference is where people who have dedicated their lives to the Georgist cause get to celebrate one another's dedication, to encourage one another, to learn from one another, and to encourage newer people to carry on the effort. It is the social glue that holds the movement together. The people who endure the financial and physical costs of attending the conference are often the people who contribute to Georgist institutions, whether annually or in the form of bequests.

Yes, the conference does not advance Georgist outreach directly (except for the YouTube videos), but it does support Georgists communicating with one another for one week out of the year to help them do outreach the other 50 weeks (with a week to take off and just chill.) Our institutional sponsors want the conference to be more formal and professional, when we need it to be just the opposite. Formal presentations have their place at the conference, but I see the real value in the personal interactions that occur when formality is out of the way.

After all, we can make formal presentations on YouTube without convening a conference, but the failure of social networking groups like Facebook to build cohesion tell us that real personal interaction only occurs in person. We need people to tell their most personal stories and concerns and then let them discuss those things informally on their own terms. We will have a session or two on that, so people with a personal story to tell should contact us and get on the schedule. We will have free time after those events where people can follow up with informal conversations.

The Academia Trap

I have also been told that the conference should be more "academic," but told at the same time that academics are not dedicated enough to come and talk for free, so we would have to pay their expenses plus honorariums ranging from \$500 to \$5,000 each. Just a few talks would eat up our entire finding, and would have us listening to people who often know less about the subject than we do. Our institutional funding might be jeopardized unless we move in a more academic direction.

Certainly we want outside perspectives, but these also exist outside of academia. What we lose when we go "professional" is the passion that drives the movement and keeps it on track. "Amateur" after all, comes from "amātor," the Latin word for "lover." Wikipedia says,

Historically, the amateur was considered to be the ideal balance between pure intent, open mind, and the interest or passion for a subject.

In that sense, we amateurs are superior to professionals. Yes, we have people who have passion for the movement and are also professional academics, but while academic credentials enhance the value of that passion, they are of little use without it.

Recognizing Outstanding Georgist Efforts

If you know of a Georgist who has done outstanding work that deserves recognition at the banquet, either as one who has accomplished a great deal or who has quietly worked behind the scenes to make other people successful, let us know on the enclosed form.

We Are Relying on You.

Institutional support continues to fall off, but personal support has been growing. That growing support and more help from volunteers has enabled us to break even for the first time in over a decade (assuming we get the foundation grant that was promised).

If you represent a member organization, we ask first that you renew your organization's \$50 dues. This gives your delegate a right to both speak and vote at the annual business meetings. As an individual, you may serve as an affiliate member for \$25 per year. Affiliate members may speak at meetings but do not vote.

I hope you will contribute to the extent you can, so the conference can continue to hold the movement together.

Sincerely,



Dan Sullivan, CGO president